

ODP 0-423
4 April 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: STIC Secretariat

FROM: Bruce T. Johnson
Director of Data Processing

SUBJECT: Comments on Draft Paper on STAP Options
for Safe

1. In its draft "STAP Options for SAFE" paper, the Science and Technology Advisory Panel recommends an approach to developing SAFE which was considered and rejected by top Agency management in 1976. At that time it was felt that a design competition and an architectural approach to a system of this size was preferable to an incremental, pilot-based approach. There were and are many who prefer the STAP concept, but we must deal today with the fact that a conscious decision was made to follow a different path, and we have already invested four years and millions of dollars creating the organizational and contractual basis for an architected SAFE. The STAP paper does not, in our view, adequately explain why a change is needed, nor does it provide the Director with a concise statement of the consequences of making such a change at this late date. Most importantly, it ignores our commitment to our co-developers in the project, DIA.

2. The merger of DIA's ADISS and SAFE, suggested by Congress and directed by the DCI, was accomplished with the understanding that DIA's needs would not be subordinated to CIA's requirements. Completion of the then ongoing design competition was delayed for almost a year while DIA's requirements were accommodated by the competing designers, and the winning design was selected in part because it was perceived to be responsive to the identified needs of both organizations. The proposed change in direction would eliminate from initial consideration the principal needs of the DIA. These needs center on the accuracy, maintenance capability and general utility of their large encyclopedic files. These files require restructuring and improved maintenance capability as well as a high level of concurrency in use. The proposed approach would of necessity center on the analyst

to support functions which are ^{of secondary} ~~of importance but secondary~~ ~~priority for~~ the DIA. We do not see how DIA's priority requirements can be met by reliance on such a CIA test-bed or pilot, and believe that adoption of the STAP option would require the dissolution of the joint project with DIA. The option paper should address this issue, for it is a circumstance in which the DCI can be expected to be deeply interested. The change would be difficult to explain to DIA, which would have to begin its development effort anew, after the loss of about two years of discarded joint effort. The change would also have to be explained to Congressional overseers who took considerable interest in the original decision to merge.

3. There is no doubt that it is possible to find advantages for CIA ~~and ultimately for DIA and the rest of the~~ (and ultimately for DIA and the rest of the Community) in the pilot approach. We would not contend that this approach is without merit; indeed, it was seriously considered when the SAFE project was being launched. We believe, however, that to develop a full scale SAFE system it is essential to define the framework within which the system will be developed. Pilot systems and experimentation have had a role in this development, but it is not apparent how one develops a full scale system from a pilot experiment without such an overall framework.

4. We in ODP have to be concerned about the many references in the STAP paper to the need to strengthen SAFE management. If our efforts have been found wanting, we would be the first to want to know about it. We find it difficult, however, to ascertain just where and how we are failing, except that we are carrying out a management decision the wisdom of which the STAP now calls into questions. We have several echelons of oversight to which we try to be responsive, and we at one time had provided for an advisory group like the Advisory Council on Technology suggested by the STAP. We have been growing increasingly aware of the need for such a body and would welcome its establishment, but would urge that it be advisory to the line managers of SAFE and to the SAFE Steering Committee, and not be given managerial authorities which would confuse and complicate an already complex, two-agency command line.

5. We accept the concept of expanded research into the ways in which computer interaction may change the analytical processes, but would urge that this be done in

parallel with a continuing development of the basic computer tools envisioned in the original SAFE concept. We believe that through the efforts of NFAC, a great deal is known about the needs and behavior of the users. The DIA has supplied users as a part of the project staff with many points of contact for Community update and user requirements. We agree that this definition of analyst's needs is a continuing effort as long as there is a SAFE. A great deal of the still-continuing work at OCR/SAS has been in this vein and it should be augmented as suggested. 1
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6. We have no disagreement, either, about the inevitability of changes in the system and we are committed to ensuring that the tools built for us by TRW are sufficiently flexible and adaptable to meet changing needs. There can be no argument with the assertion that we do not know everything we could know about the future. We would contend, however, that even after two more years of study there will still be many unknowns. At some point we have to have the courage of our convictions and start to build something. We are continuing to define a minimum set of capabilities for IOC to ensure that a useful expanded system is developed which can grow to accommodate the full set of changing and emerging needs. This problem of definition is exacerbated by the difficulty in finding deferrable functions. The cooperation of the user community is good, but there are honest mixed motivations.

7. The community involvement outlined in the paper constitutes a major redefinition of SAFE. We believe the community interests should be addressed as outlined in our memorandum to the DCI. Initial investigative work could be initiated at any point, but definition of additional capabilities should be deferred until the IOC of CIA SAFE. The overall community needs are not at this time defined, and this separate effort would involve setting community standards and collecting from each agency its specific needs for SAFE-like functions. The element in CIA SAFE most readily shareable with the community is the large Recon data base with its index documentary resources. As you know, we have under review in the IHC a CIA proposal to make this data base available to the community, perhaps through COINS. It is perhaps illustrative of the difficulty of dealing with "community" services that the IHC has spent over a year studying our proposal and no decision has yet been reached on whether this existing index should be adopted for community use.

8. I hope it is clear from the foregoing that we can support much of what the STAP is suggesting, though as noted, we are concerned about their apparent lack of confidence in our management of the project. Suggestions for steps we can take to improve will be welcome. Our real problems with the paper stem from the STAP's rejection of the management decision which has dictated the course of SAFE development to date and from our perception that to adopt their option would require us to abandon the commitment to develop SAFE jointly with DIA.

Bruce T. Johnson

cc: DDA
D/OCR
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